HOLBROOK LIBRARY
PACIFIC SCHOOL
OF RELIGION

The Christian News-Letter

Edited by
J. H. OLDHAM

No. 67 FEBRUARY 5th, 1941

DEAR MEMBER,

We are all living under a sense of impending big events. We know that what happens in the next few weeks or months may affect the course of history for generations. How may we prepare ourselves to meet this unknown future?

THE FUTURE

We experience life as a *past*, which is fixed and unalterable, a living *present*, new every moment, in which we act, and a *future* which is undetermined, and consequently full of unknown and unknowable contingencies. Because the future is unpredictable, men are afraid of it. Professor C. N. Cochrane in his book *Christianity and Classical Culture*,[1] to which I recently called attention (C.N.-L. No. 57), writing as a historian, arrives at the conclusion that the fundamental weakness of Graeco-Roman civilisation was that it was dominated by a haunting fear of the unknown. Human affairs were believed to be subject to the caprice of an incalculable Fortune, which might at any moment overwhelm human virtue and endeavour. The Christian apologists met this pessimism with the assurance that human affairs are controlled by a divine Providence. It was a distinguishing mark of Christians that they knew themselves to be living in a world governed not by fear and distrust but by love; in which, consequently, they found a new sense of community expressing itself in mutual service.

In the modern world belief in Providence has given place increasingly to a trust in man's own powers. Men were buoyed up by confidence in their own ability to make the earth a secure home for man. The brilliance of western civilization gave a feeling of security. But to-day this confidence has been shaken. Clearly or dimly men are aware of abysses opening at their feet. Forces are at work that seem to elude human control. The old fears are creeping back. Many give way to a cynical scepticism which inhibits action. Multitudes seek to forget the future in a complete absorption in the present. If we pause to reflect on the meaning of the fact that the future is unpredictable, only a Stoic attitude can meet it undaunted, only those who believe that God is in the future and the future is in God's hands can meet it with both courage and joy.

There are two fundamentally different attitudes towards the future. The one attempts to obtain control over it by fitting it into the framework of the past. We set to work to weave patterns of thought to which, consciously or unconsciously, we demand that life shall conform. We all know people who are incapable of understanding, or even seeing, anything which does not fit in with their preconceived ideas. They have built a wall between themselves and any new experience. On a wider scale, to protect themselves against the uncertainties of the future, men build political systems and civilisations which they hope will be as enduring as the hills. They work out philosophies in which they try to include the whole of reality and expect that life will flow in the channels which thought has marked out. Many of our attempts to frame blue-prints of a new social or inter-

[1] Oxford University Press, 30s.

national order are an escape from the terrifying reality of existence into an imaginary world of thought. Today all the old securities are being destroyed or loosened by shattering events. Those who cling to them for safety will discover that their hopes have been misplaced.

The other attitude to the future is one which does not try to make it conform to preconceived ideas, but consciously and fearlessly accepts it as an encounter with the unknown. It is not afraid of new situations, because it knows that God is in every situation. Into the encounter with the unknown we, of course, take with us all that experience has taught us, all that we can draw from the wisdom of the past. We need the support of principles and rules, but there must also be a direct response to what is new in the situation—to the living God who meets us in the new situation. If we believe that God is in the future, whatever it may be, we can face with calm minds both the coming crisis and the tasks that lie beyond the crisis.

War is the great destroyer of pre-existing patterns. Unless we are sufficiently alert to respond rightly to the new situation we shall be lost. The vital question for the future is whether our minds are free and elastic enough to understand the rapidly changing world. Can we free ourselves quickly enough from the control of traditional habits of thought? We are fortunate in this country in having in the different fields of human activity a trained leadership accustomed to responsibility. It is far from sufficient, but our history has provided us with good human resources. The crucial question is whether those who hold positions of influence have the disinterestedness and the imagination to see clearly what is happening and whether the patterns of their thought can be adapted rapidly enough to guide the new forces.

That is at bottom a religious issue. It is those who have a firm trust in God who can meet life unafraid and face without protecting veils the problems which it sets. It is by drawing together in a spiritual fellowship that sensitive and pioneering minds can find the encouragement and support which enables them to break through to the truth which the future demands. What greater gift than this readiness and expectancy can we pray for in the year on which we have entered, and seek, both individually and in association with others, to prepare our hearts, minds and wills to receive?

THE GROWTH OF A EUROPEAN MIND

There can be no new European order without a basis in a common European mind. We can begin to work for this even during the war.

A luncheon meeting this month in London resulted in the formation of a British and Dutch Christian Fellowship with the object of promoting fuller understanding and closer co-operation between the Christian people of the Netherlands and of the British Isles.[1] The luncheon was attended by the Archbishop of York, other leaders of the Churches and several members of Parliament, and by the Prime Minister of the Netherlands and other members of the Dutch Cabinet. The Dutch Prime Minister delivered a striking address. In July of last year, the 525th anniversary of John Huss, an Anglo-Czechoslovak Christian Fellowship was formed with a similar purpose.[2]

WORK FOR PRISONERS OF WAR

In connection with the Provisional Committee of the World Council of Churches, which has its headquarters in Switzerland, there has been set up an ecumenical Commission to care for the spiritual welfare of prisoners of war. In Germany its efforts have been directed towards obtaining the services of a chaplain for every camp. British Army chaplains who are prisoners of war are concentrated in a few camps for officers, as many as forty being in one camp, while many men's camps have no chaplains at all. There has

[1] Information can be obtained from the Commission on International Friendship and Social Responsibility, 21 Meadow Way Green, Letchworth, Herts.

[2] The Secretary is Dr. F. M. Hnik, 114 Park Street, London, W.1.

now been brought about a transfer of chaplains. The Commission has helped in obtaining for them opportunities of religious influence, accommodation for worship and meetings, and freedom to visit all parts of the camp. Permission has also been secured for outside pastors to visit the camps. Professor Courvoisier, who is a Belgian, has visited many prison camps in Germany and his visits provided for many prisoners their first contact with the outside world. The Commission is co-operating closely with the Red Cross and the Y.M.C.A. and with the *Evangelisches Hilfswerk* in Germany.

In Great Britain it has been found best to separate the work for internees and civilian prisoners from that for prisoners of war, since the problems are different in character and two different Government departments are concerned. The military authorities in Great Britain cordially welcome the help of the Churches and voluntary bodies in caring for prisoners in terms of the Geneva Convention of 1929. Similar provision is being made in other parts of the British Commonwealth to which prisoners of war are being sent.

The Pope has actively interested himself in the needs of prisoners of war in all countries. Considerable sums have been placed at his disposal for this purpose. An information bureau for prisoners of war, refugees and those who are missing has been established at the Vatican.

NEIGHBOURHOOD GROUPS

To every challenge there is a response. It may be submission to defeat or demoralisation, or it may be the conquest of difficulty by the human spirit. An illustration of the latter is the growth in recent months of Neighbourhood Groups in response to the menace of air-raids.

The groups have been started by one or two people calling on their neighbours in the same street to find out whether they are willing to co-operate in helping one another to deal with the effects of bombing. Among the activities which have been undertaken are the formation of stirrup pump parties; the custody of door keys when people leave their houses empty; the keeping of reserves of food in selected houses for those who may be bombed out of their homes; tidying up after damage to windows and houses; the formation of patrols of parents to collect and escort children during air-raids; the provision of emergency billets for those who are temporarily stranded; the arranging of first-aid lectures; the provision of first-aid outfits in certain houses; compiling a next-of-kin register, of which one copy is deposited in the Church and another with the air-raid warden; and, if the air-raid warden desires, preparing a register of the number of persons sleeping in each house.

These plans for mutual help in air-raids have led on to other forms of co-operation. An antidote to the loneliness and other drawbacks of the black-out is provided by the formation in private houses of groups for chess, cards, other games, music and singing, reading plays, listening to and discussing broadcast talks, and taking up hobbies and simple handicrafts. Neighbours give one another a hand in the cultivation of their gardens. Play groups for children after school hours not only make life brighter for them but give a tired mother in a small home the chance of a rest and time for tidying up. Sharing in these common activities creates an opportunity for those who have personal problems to turn to other members of the group for advice or information. When more technical information is needed application can be made to the nearest Citizens Advice Bureau. Where there is no such Bureau a group may itself take steps to ascertain what local resources are available.

The groups elect their own chairman and secretary and, if desired, a committee. But the minimum of organisation is best. The essence of the movement is that the groups are spontaneous growths. The National Council of Social Service,[1] from whom further particulars can be obtained, suggests in the light of experience that a convenient unit is about thirty or forty houses, or a block of flats, that each neighbourhood group should be

[1] 26 Bedford Square, London, W.C.1.

entirely self-governing, and that a group is a family affair—not exclusively for men or for women, but for everyone including young people and children.

The movement has been particularly successful in Leicester where the number of those enrolled is reported to be 27,000. There has also been a vigorous development in Birmingham. The spirit of neighbourliness which is finding expression in these groups is one that is natural to a true community. When the question of forming a neighbourhood group was being discussed at a meeting of representatives of men's and women's clubs in Durham, it was pointed out that this spirit had always been present in the mining villages, where no door is locked during the day and people often go into a neighbour's house during their absence to help with some emergency or family need. The spirit of the good neighbour is indeed characteristic of working-class life throughout the country. It is in danger of fading out in the life of cities, and is happily being recaptured in response to the needs of war-time.

RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION

A fortnight ago I called attention to the public concern about the instruction of the youth of the nation in the Christian faith and ethics. This concern may evaporate in mere feeling unless active steps are taken to do something about it. The vital matter is that the different parties concerned should be brought together for consultation and action. It is good news that the Bishop of Salisbury has set in motion a common effort of this kind in his diocese. Following on a conference convened by him a voluntary council of inquiry has been formed in the diocese. It is divided into two county sections and includes chairmen and directors of education, heads of public schools, secondary and elementary head teachers, clergy—Anglican, Roman Catholic and Free Church—and representatives of the Mothers' Union. It will examine with complete frankness the whole position. There is a remarkable spirit of co-operation and the two committees are addressing themselves to their task with enthusiasm. The National Society, as the Central Council for the Church of England for Religious Education, has a comprehensive plan for a new national movement on behalf of religious education, in which the collaboration will be sought of diocesan authorities, the Free Church administrators and teachers.

Our members will be interested to know that we have had over 11,000 fresh orders for the reprint of the Supplement "Pater Noster". Our Christmas Gift Scheme brought us 919 new members. The Christmas number was sent by our members to 1,700 new friends.

Yours sincerely,

J. H. Oldham

"Pater Noster"—Reprint in eight-page leaflet form, $7\frac{1}{4}' \times 3$ ins., will be ready shortly. Single copy 3d.; 6 for 1s. 2d.; 12 for 1s. 11d.; 25 for 3s. 6d.; 50 for 5s.; 100 for 9s.; 250 for 18s. 6d.; 500 for 32s. 6d.; and 1,000 for 57s. 6d.

Bound Volumes—Volume I out of print, Volume II (Nos. 27-52), bound in green cloth with gold lettering and Index. 8s. 6d. post free.

Subscriptions—The rate of subscriptions to the News-Letter is 12s. 6d. ($3.0 in U.S.A. and Canada) for one year, and 6s. 6d. ($1.50 in U.S.A. and Canada) for six months, and 3s. 6d. for three months. Single copies—4d. each, 1s. 2d. for 6, 1s. 11d. for 12 copies post free.

All communications and subscriptions should be sent to—

THE CHRISTIAN NEWS-LETTER, ARLOSH HALL, MANSFIELD ROAD, OXFORD.

Published by Dr. J. H. Oldham for the Council on the Christian Faith and the Common Life and printed by the Kemp Hall Press, Ltd., in the City of Oxford.